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**Early Learning & Children's  
Services Committee**

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**HB 3061**

**Brief Description:** Creating a department to elevate the importance of child well-being as an essential outcome of an effective child welfare system.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Schual-Berke, Darneille, Appleton, Moeller and Hasegawa.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Establishes a panel to develop a plan for implementing an executive branch children's department.
- Declares legislative intent to implement an executive branch children's department by July 1, 2012.

**Hearing Date:** 2/1/08

**Staff:** Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

**Background:**

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is led by a secretary appointed by the Governor and is comprised of five separate administrations. Each of the administration is led by an assistant secretary who reports directly to the Secretary of the DSHS. The scope of programs and services administered by the DSHS include:

- (1) Health and Recover Services, including alcohol and substance abuse; mental health and healthcare services;
- (2) Economic Services, including employment and assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; child support enforcement; and refugee and immigrant assistance;
- (3) Children's Services, including child protection and child welfare services;
- (4) Aging and Disability Services, including developmental disabilities services; home and community services; and residential care services; and

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

(5) Juvenile Rehabilitation Services, including institutional and community programs; and treatment and intergovernmental programs.

**Summary of Bill:**

Legislative intent to create a separate executive branch children's department is expressed. The new department would become operational by July 1, 2012, and would be designed to promote safety, permanency, and well-being and would focus on child well-being as a core outcome of child welfare services. The new department would operate with budget autonomy, including reinvestment authority for unspent allocations, and be directed by an experienced and successful leader with expertise in child protection and child welfare programs and services.

A design panel is established for the purpose of creating a transition plan and a fiscal projection for implementation of the new department. The design panel would be composed of seven independent experts with extensive backgrounds in child welfare, child protection, child development, mental health, and related fields. Appointment of the design panel would be the shared responsibility for the Legislature and the Governor, with the Governor appointing three members and each chamber of the Legislature appointing two members. Appointments must be completed by June 1, 2008. Staff support to the design panel would be provided by the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington.

The design panel would create a transition plan and fiscal projection by consensus with the intent that both would constitute a cohesive roadmap for implementation of the new department by July 1, 2012. The panel is directed to use the best available data and research and to examine existing state and federal funding streams for possible consolidation or leveraging for attracting more resources.

The transition plan must include research-based policy reforms and performance measures that are focused on child safety, permanency, and well-being; that are consistent with federal requirements and with the terms of any legal settlements to which the state is party. The design panel must define the degree to which the new department should be primarily regulatory; the degree of privatization or contracting out recommended; means of increasing administrative efficiencies; a process for expanding the mission of the department to include prevention, early intervention, and treatment of child abuse and neglect; whether children's mental health should be a function of the new agency; which functions and programs from existing agencies should be incorporated into the new department; and performance outcome measures that will result in more relevant child welfare outcomes.

The new department must be structured to achieve:

- (1) A heightened focus on assessing and promoting child well-being in the development and delivery of child welfare programs and services;
- (2) Greater effectiveness in preventing and responding early to child maltreatment through the use of evidence and research-based practices;
- (3) Qualitative change in social work practice and service delivery that is supported by policy-based resource allocations;
- (4) Improvements in organizational structure for the delivery, coordination, and contracting of child welfare services;
- (5) A more stable balance between state control of children's services and local flexibility to deliver effective services that respond to community needs and enhance community strengths; and

(6) Development of more collaborative partnerships with public and private entities focused on meeting a common core set of visible, cohesive, and consistent child-oriented performance measures.

The broader goals to be achieved by the new agency include improved intra-organizational and extra-organizational relationships; a new balance of central versus local control; and stronger relationships promoting a culture of respect.

The design panel will submit a preliminary report in September 2009, with the final transition plan and fiscal projection due July 1, 2010. The design panel must include in its preliminary report recommendations regarding criteria for selection of an interim director who would be appointed to oversee the transition from the current structure to the new department. Criteria for appointment of the department director would be included in the design panel's final report.

By September 1, 2010, the Governor must appoint an interim director to lead implementation of the transition plan, including any revisions made to the plan. Legislative staff are directed to utilize the transition plan and fiscal projection to develop, by December 1, 2010, proposed legislation to implement the new department. Not later than July 1, 2012, the Governor must appoint a director to lead the department following full implementation of the transition plan.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 21, 2008.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.